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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to increase the literacy growth of kindergarten students through the use of developmentally appropriate emergent literacy practices. The kindergarten language arts curriculum did not meet the diverse literacy needs of the kindergarten students. The goal of the practicum was to meet the diverse literacy needs of the kindergarten students. The writer developed eight integrated thematic units that incorporated emergent literacy instructional strategies, i.e. read-alouds, story retell using props, shared reading, acquisition of unit related vocabulary, music and art activities, and writing activities. The writer also developed a home-school connection designed to create a link between home and school and to provide parents and students with an opportunity to work together to improve literacy skills. In addition the writer created a print-rich classroom environment to promote literacy and literacy awareness. Data from a teacher-made questionnaire completed before and after the practicum implementation indicated that teachers were successful in implementing the emergent literacy instructional strategies. Teachers also reported on the effectiveness of the integrated thematic approach to instruction, the home-school connection, and the print-rich classroom environment. Contains 45 references; an appendix presents a teacher questionnaire. (Author/RS)

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Increasing the Literacy Growth of Kindergarten Students Through Developmentally Appropriate Emergent Literacy Practices

by
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Cluster 76

A Practicum II Report presented to the
Ed.D Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Abstract

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This practicum was designed to increase the literacy growth of kindergarten students through the use of developmentally appropriate emergent literacy practices. The kindergarten language arts curriculum did not meet the diverse literacy needs of the kindergarten students. The goal of the practicum was to meet the diverse literacy needs of the kindergarten students.

The writer developed eight, integrated thematic units that incorporated emergent literacy instructional strategies, i.e. read-alouds, story retell using props, shared reading, acquisition of unit related vocabulary, music and art activities, and writing activities. The writer also developed a home-school connection designed to create a link between home and school and to provide parents and students with an opportunity to work together to improve literacy skills. In addition the writer created a print-rich classroom environment to promote literacy and literacy awareness.

Data from a teacher-made questionnaire completed before and after the practicum implementation indicated that teachers were successful in implementing the emergent literacy instructional strategies. Teachers also reported on the effectiveness of the integrated thematic approach to instruction, the home-school connection, and the print-rich classroom environment.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

The community in which the kindergarten through grade five elementary school was located was a large, urban area in the southeastern United States. The multi-cultural, multi-ethnic population of approximately two million people resided in a county that was divided into an estimated 14 municipalities. Each municipality was governed independently; however, all of the municipalities were part of the county-wide school system.

The county-wide school district was headed by a superintendent and governed by a nine member school board. The school board members were elected by and represented single member districts in an effort to better reflect the community and population the board served. The school board determined the policies, guidelines, and mandates for all of the 300 schools within the district and the approximately 350,000 students enrolled in district schools.

To better facilitate the daily operation of one of the largest school systems in the United States, the district was divided into six region offices. Each region had a region superintendent, region director, and curriculum support staff. The responsibility of the region office was to monitor the compliance of the schools assigned to the region with respect to the policies, guidelines, and mandates established by the district. In addition, the region office addressed the needs and issues that are unique to the schools within the region.

The school district served a diversified population ethnically, culturally, and

economically. The student population was 54% Hispanic, 33% Black, 11% White, and 2% Asian. Over 48 languages and 278 dialects were spoken. Approximately 55% of the student population received free or reduced lunches which indicated that these students came from households with a weekly income of less than $586 for a family of four.

Description of the Work Setting

The elementary school work setting employed 3 administrators, 50 teachers, and 40 support personnel who served 620 students. The administrative team consisted of a principal and two assistant principals. One assistant principal was responsible for the exceptional student education program and the other was responsible for the regular education program. Of the 50 teachers, 31 were assigned to exceptional student education classes and 19 were assigned to regular education classes. The 40 support personnel included a counselor, reading facilitator, technology facilitator, 2 physical therapists, 1 occupational therapist, 1 media specialist, 2 speech pathologists, 1 psychologist, and 30 paraprofessionals. Only five of the paraprofessionals worked in the regular education program (one paraprofessional for each grade level, kindergarten through grade four). The ethnic balance of the staff was 56% Black, 33% White, and 11% Hispanic.

The student population included 320 students who were enrolled in exceptional student education classes and 300 students who were enrolled in regular education classes. Exceptional student education included classes for educable mentally handicapped, trainable mentally handicapped, profoundly mentally handicapped, autistic, and physically impaired. The regular education program included two sections of kindergarten, four first

grades, three second grades, three third grades, two fourth grades, and two fifth grades. Class size in the regular education program ranged from 18-20 students in each section of grades one through three, and 28-34 students in kindergarten and grades four and five. One class section in grades one through four was designated as an Academic Excellence class. Teachers recommended students for placement in the academic excellence class and/or the student was placed in the class on the basis of Standford Achievement Test scores.

Unlike the ethnically and culturally diversified student population in most of the schools within the district, the total school population in the work setting was 88% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 2% White. In the regular education program the student population was 99% Black and 1% Hispanic. Approximately 92% of the regular student population received free or reduced lunches. Enrollment records indicated that 75% of the students were being raised in single parent households or by extended family members (aunts, grandparents, and so forth). In addition, 10% were being raised in foster care homes. Only 15% of the students came from two parent households. Sixty percent of the caregivers had not completed high school.

On the Standford Achievement Test (SAT) and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), students at the work setting scored below the national, state, and local averages in reading and reading comprehension. Also, fourth grade students scored below the state and local averages on the Florida Writes! test which measures the ability of the student to use age-appropriate writing skills. The low test scores placed the school on the state list of critically low performing schools.

Writer's Role

The writer was one of two kindergarten teachers at the work setting. The writer taught 17 years in a variety of instructional positions and locations. Three of the seventeen years were spent teaching first grade in a rural community in the Midwest. The writer also taught kindergarten three years in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic metropolitan area in the far west. For the last 11 years the writer taught kindergarten at the work setting and was responsible for the instruction, assessment, and supervision of approximately 30 kindergarten students each school year.

In addition to teaching, the writer was the kindergarten/first grade chairperson. The duties of the position included acting as a liaison between the administration and the grade level teachers, serving as a mentor and role model for beginning teachers, assisting the administrators in monitoring programs and the progress toward instructional goals, and providing professional development information for staff members.

Finally, the writer served on the School Improvement Plan Committee, the grade card committee, the media center committee, and the language arts committee. The writer also served as a resource person for grant writing and has been awarded approximately $35,000 for various projects to enhance classroom instruction and school programs.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that the school was not adequately prepared to meet the literacy needs of the kindergarten students.

Problem Description

The school was not providing a language arts curriculum that met the diversified needs of the students. Kindergarten students entered school at age five. Approximately 15 out of 60 kindergarten students at the work setting attended the Head Start program one year prior to entering kindergarten. Another 15 students were enrolled in day care one year prior to entering kindergarten. The remaining 30 students remained at home with a caregiver until eligible for kindergarten. With the exception of the Head Start students, the children entering kindergarten did not come to school with age-appropriate literacy skills. All of the children entered a kindergarten program that did not foster emergent literacy development. The language arts curriculum currently being used began formal reading instruction in kindergarten. The curriculum emphasized drill and practice of isolated skills, sequential skill development, and mastery of the skills as a prerequisite for progress. The students entering kindergarten were not ready to participate in this type of formal language arts instruction.

Kindergarten students and teachers experienced frequent frustration and failure with the existing program. During language arts instruction students exhibited inattentive behaviors, an inability to follow the instruction, and an unwillingness to participate. Students were uninterested in the instructional strategies used, i.e. workbooks,

worksheets, flashcards, and so forth. Over 75% of the students failed to achieve the benchmarks outlined in the curriculum. Teachers expressed frustration about using a curriculum that was not addressing the diverse literacy needs of the students. Teachers spent planning time preparing lessons utilizing strategies and materials that were not developmentally appropriate for the students. Also, teachers were frustrated by having to evaluate students on skills that were not appropriate for the instructional level of the students and then having to report the lack of student progress to parents.

As a result of not meeting the literacy needs of the students, students left kindergarten without the literacy skills necessary to experience success in the first grade reading program. The first grade reading program began by assuming that the students possessed literacy skills necessary to continue with formal reading instruction. Seventy-five percent of the students entered first grade without reaching the kindergarten benchmarks and then were expected to master the first grade benchmarks.

Problem Documentation

To gather evidence of the problem in the work setting, the writer reviewed the guidelines for literacy programs developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1990), The International Reading Association (1988), and the Association for Childhood Education International (1987). Some of the guidelines were used to develop a written questionnaire that was completed by the kindergarten teachers (Appendix A). The questions were designed to reveal the instructional strategies and the components of the language arts curriculum.

The first question was subdivided into 12 response items addressing the various

instructional strategies used in literacy programs, e.g. read-alouds, shared reading, word awareness, and so forth. Teachers were asked to respond according to how many times per week the instructional strategies were used in the classroom. The Likert scale used included the following response options: (a) never [0 times], (b) rarely [1-2 times], (c) sometimes [3-4 times], and, (d) frequently [5 or more times]. Responses of "never" and "rarely" provided evidence to substantiate the problem. The second question was subdivided into four response items that addressed the components found in literacy programs and used a Likert scale that included the following response options: (a) no; (b) sort of; (c) yes; and, (d) yes, definitely. The third and final question used the same Likert scale as in question two and asked teachers to reveal an overall feeling regarding the kindergarten language arts curriculum and the curriculum's success in meeting the needs of the students. A "no" response was used to provide evidence of the problem.

In response to the first question on the teacher-made questionnaire which addressed instructional strategies, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers revealed the following:

a. Activities involving story retell using props and shared reading of a story were used rarely in classroom instruction (1-2 times per week).

b. Activities involving memorization of simple poems and rhymes were used rarely in classroom instruction (1-2 times per week).

c. Activities involving the acquisition and use of new vocabulary related to the unit of study were used rarely in classroom instruction (1-2 times per week).

d. Activities involving student selection were never used in classroom instruction (0 times per week).

e. Activities involving music and art were used rarely in classroom instruction (1-2 times per week).

f. Activities involving writing were used rarely in classroom instruction (1-2 times per week).

g. Activities involving the use of literacy supported learning centers were used rarely in classroom instruction (1-2 times per week).

In response to the second question on the questionnaire which addressed the components of literacy programs, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers revealed the following:

a. The language arts curriculum did not include an integrated, thematic approach to instruction and learning.

b. The language arts curriculum did not include a home-school component.

c. The language arts curriculum did not include developmentally appropriate experiences.

In response to the third question on the questionnaire, when asked if the language arts curriculum met the needs of the kindergarten students, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers responded "no".

The American Association of School Librarians recommended that there should be five books for each child in the classroom and the books should be changed frequently (Miller & Anderson, 1996). Based on teacher interviews, classroom observations, and a review of library check-out records, the following additional evidence of the problem was revealed.

a. Two out of two kindergarten teachers checked out 20 books per month (less than 1

book per student) for classroom use.

b. Two out of two kindergarten teachers shelved all library books so that only the bindings of the books were visible to the students.

c. Two out of two kindergarten teachers allowed students to select a book to look at only when student class work was completed.

Teacher interviews and classroom observations also revealed that:

a. Two out of two kindergarten teachers designated one classroom bulletin board to display student work.

b. Two out of two kindergarten teachers did not use classroom labels, meaningful word lists, and/or environmental print in the classroom.

Teacher interviews, teacher-parent contact logs, and meeting attendance rosters revealed the following:

a. Although teacher-parent contacts were frequent, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers reported that only 1 out of every 10 parent contacts were made to communicate positive messages.

b. Only six out of thirty students were represented by a parent or caregiver at the yearly Open House.

c. An average of only 2 out of 30 students were represented by a parent or caregiver at the monthly Parent-Teacher Association meetings.

d. Two out of two kindergarten teachers reported having no parent visitation to the classroom for the purpose of observation or participation.

Causative Analysis

There were several causes leading to the problem of meeting the literacy needs of the kindergarten students in the work setting. The causes emanated from the county-based competency curriculum and the differing educational philosophies regarding literacy development among district personnel, regional personnel, administrators, and teachers. In addition, current teaching practice was a contributing factor to the problem.

The county school district developed a grade level competency based curriculum for all subject areas, including language arts. The curriculum outlined the behavioral objectives and the outcomes that all students should achieve before being promoted to the next grade level. The language arts guidelines for kindergarten assumed that every student entered school with sufficient literacy skills. The guidelines appropriately addressed the students who entered school with an age-appropriate vocabulary, an awareness of print, an understanding of the relationship between the spoken and written word, and so forth. For those students the competencies were achievable. However, the kindergarten students at the work setting did not enter school with the literacy skills necessary to be successful in mastering the language arts competencies. The competency based curriculum failed to close the gap between students who entered school with appropriate literacy skills and the students who did not.

Also, the competency-based curriculum did not reflect developmentally appropriate expectations for kindergarten students, particularly at-risk kindergarten students. The language arts competencies for kindergarten students reflected the formal reading instruction that was part of the present kindergarten curriculum. The International

Reading Association (1986) expressed concern about exposing pre-first grade students to formal pre-reading instruction accompanied with "inappropriate expectations and experiences for their levels of development" (p. 4). Students who were well prepared for school may adjust to a kindergarten learning environment where there is pressure to conform to formal reading instruction, however, students who were considered at-risk experienced academic failure immediately.

There were conflicting philosophies among district and school site personnel regarding developmentally appropriate practices and emergent literacy. District offices such as the Office for Language Arts Instruction and the Office of Early Childhood Education did not agree on the components present in an effective kindergarten language arts curriculum. The Office for Language Arts Instruction supported the use of a formal, commercially produced, skills-based curriculum that initiated a structured approach to reading instruction in kindergarten. The curriculum being used should support the language arts competency based curriculum developed by the district. On the other hand, the Office of Early Childhood Education supported the idea of using developmentally appropriate, emergent literacy practices. The early childhood supervisors advocated Allington's (1994) belief that the emphasis in kindergarten should not be on the curriculum, but on the instructional strategies used to promote literacy.

Philosophical differences existed between the administrative team and classroom teachers. The administrative team at the work setting did not subscribe to the philosophy of developmentally appropriate practices and did not support fostering emergent literacy skills in kindergarten, while the kindergarten teachers advocated both. The administrative

team was concerned with test scores on standardized tests and parent's perceptions of what demonstrated student achievement. Consequently, the administrative team felt "earlier is better". Students who are exposed to a formal reading curriculum at an early age will become better readers. Unlike the administrative team, kindergarten teachers supported the emergent literacy perspective. Students learn to read and write through meaningful experiences within the environment and through activities that are developmentally appropriate.

Because of the philosophical differences regarding language arts instruction among district educators and because teachers must follow district and school guidelines, kindergarten teachers were not incorporating developmentally appropriate practices and emergent literacy activities into language arts instruction. After covering the material in the designated language arts curriculum, teachers had little time to include the components and instructional strategies that are characteristic of an emergent literacy kindergarten program.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The literature reviewed included books, journal articles, and research studies that addressed language arts curriculum, literacy development, and developmentally appropriate literacy practices for pre-first grade children. For the most part, all of the literature reviewed was written within the last 10 years. However, several articles and studies that provided significant information about how students learn to read and write were written as much as 12 years ago. The literature reviewed revealed that in order to meet the diversified literacy needs of young children, schools must embrace a paradigm

shift with respect to literacy development.

Teale (1995) contrasted the reading readiness approach to reading and the emergent literacy theory in an effort to show that developmental research on reading and writing supports the emergent literacy philosophy. Reading readiness was still being used in kindergarten classrooms and was based on the following theories: (a) before reading, children must master the prerequisite skills; (b) children first learn to speak, then read, and finally learn to write; (c) children learn reading and writing skills through isolated practice of the skills; (d) visual and auditory discrimination of letters and sounds are necessary foundations for reading; and, (e) children progress through the same stages in acquiring reading skills and each stage should be evaluated formally (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). The philosophy of emergent literacy stemed from research that proposeed the following theories: (a) the development of reading and writing begins early in a child's life; (b) the development of speaking, reading, and writing are related and occur concurrently; (c) literacy develops through children engaging in real-life activities; (d) children learn to read and write through contact with the environment; (e) literacy development is a result of a combination of knowledge, attitudes, and approaches that engage children; and, (f) the stages of literacy development are general and occur at different times and rates in children (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Based on research in reading and language arts education, early childhood education, psychology, and linguistics, Sulzby (1991) described emergent literacy as the reading and writing theories, attitudes, and behaviors that occur prior to conventional literacy.

Sulzby's (1991) definition of emergent literacy was widely accepted among

researchers, early childhood educators, reading teachers, educational leaders, and policy makers. However, the frequency of incorporation of emergent literacy practices in preschools and kindergartens was unknown. Teale (1995) stated that "although emergent literacy is clearly a major influence on theory and research in early childhood education today, and has influenced classroom practice significantly, the actual extent of its impact on practice has not yet been documented" (p. 109).

Moffat (1994) suggested accepting a pedagogy that incorporated previously unacknowledged ways of learning to read and write. Literacy came about when children were immersed in an environment of literacy. Whether at home or at school, children needed to interact with the environment and the individuals within the environment. Moffat emphasized that promoting literacy in schools meant shifting the focus of instruction from materials to people and recognizing the literacy value of the folk practices parents had been using at home. The emergent literacy research validated the folk practices and challenged existing methods of reading instruction. "Literacy emerges in many ways and places that we have not suspected and have therefore not regarded as learning circumstances" (Moffat, 1994, p.xix).

Researchers viewed literacy development as a complex integrated process that is physical, psychological, social, and linguistic. Strickland (1990) provided perspectives for literacy development that assisted in understanding how children learn to read and write. First, literacy development occured from infancy through adulthood. Children's exposure to print and verbal interactions with caregivers was the child's primary source of learning. The frequency and quality of the interactions determined the degree of literacy

development. Second, the development of speaking, reading, and writing skills was intertwined. Once thought to be independently developed, the skills were now thought to be interdependent. Each of the skills promoted the other. Third, literacy development was dependent on the engagement of the child in meaningful activities. Participation in isolated tasks for the purpose of future skill development did not capitalize on the child's interest or motivation. Meaningful activities enabled the child to make immediate connections between oral and written language. Fourth, interaction with adults who provide feedback was essential. As children began to experiment with oral and written language, adults needed to be available to listen and respond to the child's attempts to read and write. Fifth, participating in shared reading increased literacy development. Adults and children reading together assisted in developing literacy through print awareness, modeling, discussion, and participation in reading.

The debate between the traditional reading readiness proponents and the emergent literacy advocates continued to be present within schools and school districts. However, Kulleseid and Strickland (1989) noted that regardless of one's approach to teaching literacy, educators agreed that the following six beliefs were building blocks for addressing the literacy needs of young children.

1. Students learn to read and write through participation in meaningful activities. Motivation is key to engaging students in learning to read and write. When students are actively and personally involved in the activity, learning takes place.

2. Oral language development and literacy are interrelated. Oral language, reading, and writing are all interdependent forms of communication and required involvement on

the part of the learner.

3. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are part of an integrated framework. Schools must address all of the various forms of communication in language arts curricula.

4. Literature is an important resource for the literacy curriculum. Throughout the subject areas, literature provides an unlimited source of information that should be used as a base for instruction.

5. A wide variety of instructional strategies are important for literacy development. Time frames for instruction are flexible, materials are varied, at least part of the instruction is self-selected by the students, and student grouping varies. Teacher-driven, textbook, whole-group instruction as the sole means of developing literacy is ineffective.

6. The teacher is the manager and the facilitator. "The teacher functions in dual capacities as leader and learner; as mentor and monitor, as collaborator and conductor; as sympathetic shoulder and high-wire artist" (Kulleseid & Strickland, 1989, p. 3).

To address the diverse literacy needs of students, schools needed to avoid teaching reading and writing skills through the use of workbooks, drill, and practice and accept a new paradigm for literacy instruction (Ollilia & Mayfield, 1992). Schools utilizing a reading readiness approach to reading and writing which stresses the development of isolated, sequential skills and/or utilize instructional strategies where skills are introduced before students are developmentally ready, were not empowering students to become literate. The new framework of emergent literacy did not avoid skill development but accepted the concept that children can demonstrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening behaviors before acquiring formal skills. Emerging literacy focused on advancing

children's learning through exposure to a meaningful, print rich environment. Strickland and Morrow (1989) elaborated on this idea: "Teachers who view literacy as a natural part of children's ongoing development tend to view skills as interconnecting parts of a whole. They are concerned with helping children develop strategies for learning to read and write. They know that as children acquire strategies they automatically acquire skills" (p.82).

The International Reading Association (1988) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1990) also classified teaching isolated skills in reading and writing as inappropriate for young children. In addition, both organizations suggested that subjecting prefirst grade children to formal prereading programs was inappropriate for the developmental level of the children. An age-appropriate, prefirst grade language arts curriculum would build on children's prior knowledge of reading and writing to drive the instruction, create a positive environment for literacy development, provide numerous opportunities to participate in meaningful and useful literacy activities, accept diversity in language and culture, and integrate reading across the curriculum.

The problem of meeting the diverse literacy needs of students was even more pronounced among disadvantaged or at-risk students. Allington (1991) and Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991) agreed that the gap that exists between students who entered school with age-appropriate literacy skills and those who did not, widened as the students progressed through school. Allington underscored the fact that most of the students who entered school without age-appropriate literacy skills and experienced difficulty in traditional reading readiness programs were children of poverty. Schools traditionally assigned such students to remedial reading classes, special education

classes, and/or transitional programs. Furthermore, these students were the ones likely to repeat one or more grade levels in an effort to help them "catch up".

Additional evidence that schools have failed to address the literacy needs of disadvantaged students was suggested by Allington (1994). Allington suggested that for at-risk students schools tend to: (a) lower expectations for students based on students' lack of experience, (b) focus on separating students by ability rather than supporting and enhancing literacy development, (c) focus on the curriculum rather than the instruction, (d) fail to spend enough time on reading and writing, (e) fail to model reading strategies for literacy development, and (f) emphasize remembering rather than comprehending what was read. Without changing these practices, disadvantaged students were not given an opportunity to achieve the same literacy levels as the other students (Allington).

Strickland (1994a) emphasized the need to use a new literacy framework for disadvantaged students. "As the definition of what it means to be literate in our society becomes more demanding and more complex, the constraints of skills-based teaching become increasingly evident" (p.330). Whether intending to or not, skill-based teaching put a cap on learning. Students mastered the skill and thought that the learning was over. Also, students who participated in a program that had low expectations for achievement did not develop strategies for gaining and evaluating new knowledge. The new framework for meeting the literacy needs of disadvantaged students included: (a) increased attention and understanding of the relationship of reading and writing, (b) increased use of trade books, (c) student selection of reading and writing material, and, (d) integration of literacy activities and other content areas.

The literature reviewed included research studies that provided evidence that the concern for addressing the literacy needs of students was prevalent among researchers. A research study involving a stratified, random sample from 76 districts in a Midwestern state was conducted to solicit information regarding the goals and expectations of kindergarten literacy programs (Freeman & Hatch, 1989; Hatch & Freeman, 1988). Of the 76 districts, 61 report cards were reviewed and provided the data base for the study. Assuming that report cards reflected what was being taught in the classroom, the items on each of the cards were categorized into groups of the same skill, behavior, attitude, or attribute. Based on the types of items found on a majority of the report cards, the researchers discovered that: (a) schools were primarily using traditional reading readiness programs in kindergarten, (b) kindergarten students were expected to learn specific skills, (c) kindergarten classrooms were using a formal basal reading program, (d) there was no emphasis on writing, and, (e) handwriting instruction was an important skill.

Nielson and Monson (1996) studied two kindergarten classrooms that utilized different literacy structures, i.e. emergent literacy and reading readiness. The study focused on 83 children with special attention being given to a group of children who were younger than the others upon entering kindergarten. Observations revealed a difference in instructional strategies being used in the two classes that reflected the teachers' philosophy of literacy development. The results indicated that the students in the emergent literacy classroom made significant gains in literacy development despite being younger than the students in the reading readiness kindergarten. The researchers concluded that the emergent literacy environment was particularly effective with students that exhibited at-risk factors.

Meisels (1992) and Walsh (1989) conducted studies that recommended that decision makers should be concerned with finding a curriculum that best suits the literacy needs of kindergarten students. After observing and interviewing kindergarten teachers and students and administering pre-posttest assessments of literacy achievement, both Meisels and Walsh concluded that age, sex, and background were less important to the success of the students than the appropriateness of the curriculum and the teaching philosophy of the teacher. Students in classrooms where the literacy activities were age-appropriate demonstrated greater gains in literacy development than students who were in classrooms where the curriculum was inappropriate for the age level.

A five year longitudinal study conducted by Phillips, Norris, and Mason (1996) that measured the impact of early literacy development on future reading success in grades one, two, three, and four used a control group design. The study began with 318 kindergarten students and ended with 214 fourth grade students. Three groups participated in a literacy intervention that involved the use of beginning-to-read booklets. One group used the booklets at home, one group used the booklets at school, and the control group did not use the booklets. Data was gathered at the beginning and end of each grade level. Both of the experimental groups demonstrated that the students' knowledge of early literacy strategies increased in kindergarten and resulted in improved reading achievement in grades one, two, three, and four. The most significant gains were reported for the group that used the intervention in school.

Research studies by Huba and Ramisetty-Mikler (1995) and Davidson and Snow (1995) compared the literacy development of early and nonearly readers and came to two

conclusions. Both studies paired an early reader with a nonearly reader. The pairs were observed, audio-recorded, and interviewed to determine language ability, verbal intelligence, and phonemic segmentation. Parents were also interviewed. Early readers continued to out perform the nonearly readers throughout the subsequent grades. The researchers concluded that early readers came from homes where there was evidence of substantial literacy activity and that schools needed to change classroom practices to coincide with how children become literate.

Vellutino and Scanlon (1987) conducted a longitudinal study with kindergartners to explore a possible correlation between reading ability and phonemic awareness. Two hundred ninety-five kindergarten students in suburban, rural, and urban areas were given a screening battery to predict who might experience difficulty in reading. The students were tested again at the end of first and second grade using a standardized reading test and a pseudoword decoding test. The results indicated that children who did not possess phonemic awareness skills experienced reading difficulties in subsequent grades. The students were reading at least one half year below grade level. Furthermore, the measures of vocabulary, verbal concepts, sentence imitation, contextual use of sentences, and use of inflections also were highly correlated with success in beginning reading which led Vellutino and Scanlan to conclude that children who participated in a holistic approach to literacy, as opposed to just one methodology, fared better.

Literacy development among low socioeconomic families was a concern shared by researchers. For at-risk students, literacy problems were the most frequent cause of failure in school (Purcell-Gates & Dahl, 1991). Skills-based instruction was the

predominant instructional strategy used in inner city schools according to Purcell-Gates and Dahl. The focus of this study was to gain insights on the learners' perspectives of literacy instruction. Of the 35 randomly selected, at-risk kindergarten students, 12 were selected for the longitudinal study. All of the ethnically diversified sample population (n=35) was enrolled in one of three traditional, reading readiness kindergartens. During first grade, the students participated in a traditional, basal reading program. In kindergarten and at the end of first grade, the 35 students were given a six-task, written language knowledge assessment. Close observation of the 12 students began in kindergarten and continued throughout first grade. Data analysis based on observations, artifacts, audio recordings, and scores on the pre-posttest written language knowledge assessment caused the researchers to conclude that learning to read and write depended on the ability of the child to: (a) associate print with the environment; (b) understand that print has function; (c) recognize that print changes according to the function; (d) connect print and speech; and, (e) based on experiences, learn syntax and form.

Juel (1988) studied 54 ethnically diversified, at-risk first grade students through fourth grade. In the fall and spring of each grade level, a battery of tests and interviews designed to measure phonemic awareness, decoding, word recognition, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, basal reading placement, home reading, desire to read, IQ, spelling, writing, and ideas were administered to the 54 students. The results of the study indicated that students whose literacy needs were not met in kindergarten were poor readers in first grade and continued to be poor readers in subsequent grades. The primary contributing factor to poor reading ability for the sample population studied was a lack of

phonemic awareness.

The causes of the problem ranged from philosophical differences, confusion about what was the best practice, comfort levels, and external pressures. Kulleseid and Strickland (1989) and Strickland (1994b) emphasized the growing confusion among administrators and teachers as to which approach (emergent literacy or reading readiness) should be used to facilitate children's literacy development. Teachers and administrators appreciated the significant responsibility of the school to develop the reading abilities of students. In an effort to accept this responsibility, educators sought to find the appropriate instructional strategies that would accomplish the task. However, with a substantial number of supporters for both emergent literacy and reading readiness strategies, educators were left to sort out the pros and cons of both approaches and to make a decision as to which approach best met the literacy needs of the students.

McNinch and Gruber (1996) noted that all too frequently parents, teachers, and administrators had conflicting views concerning literacy development which affected how literacy was taught. "Research with teachers has shown that the beliefs which teachers hold about literacy and learning influence how they teach literacy and are necessarily guided and sometimes controlled by their building principals and immediate instructional supervisors" (McNinch & Gruber, p.130). When conflicting views and goals for literacy development were present among administrators and/or teachers, the result was inconsistent and uncoordinated pedagogy. The literacy development of the students was jeopardized.

Not only should administrators and teachers share common goals for literacy

development, parents should also share the same goals (McNinch & Gruber, 1996; O'Brien, 1989). Frequently, parents exerted pressure on schools to offer formal academic instruction in kindergarten (O'Brien). Parents were concerned with children's academic progress, particularly in reading and math. Consequently, parents wanted children to read as soon as possible and wanted proof of reading ability as early as kindergarten. In response to the pressure, administrators and school districts resorted to introducing formal reading instruction or utilizing a reading readiness curriculum to placate parents and provide hard evidence of student achievement to parents (workbooks, basal readers, dittos, flash cards, and so forth).

Additional pressure from school districts and the general population was on administrators and teachers to use skill-based instruction in kindergarten. With declining standardized test scores both nationally and locally and the national and local attention given to the decline, educators fell victim to the philosophy that "earlier is better". Any regard for developmentally appropriate literacy practices was ignored and students were expected to achieve unrealistic goals.

Other causes leading to the problem centered around the comfort level of teachers. According to Lancy and Talley (1994) and Moffat (1994), teachers were more comfortable using a published and marketed language arts curriculum. The prepared curriculum provided teachers with goals, objectives, outcomes, lesson plans, materials, and evaluation procedures. All that was required of the teacher was to follow the curriculum. In the age of accountability, teachers felt more secure in implementing a marketed program.

Teachers and administrators were unaware of the current research with respect to how children learn to read and write and therefore used teaching strategies that were familiar (Jalongo & Zeigler, 1987). If teachers were aware of current research, "much of the theory and research was in direct conflict with the traditions, curricula, methods, and materials in use" (Jalongo & Zeigler, p.97). Teachers were not prepared to support the literacy development of the students. The daily demands on educators, the isolation, and lack of opportunities for inservice education have prevented many teachers from becoming familiar with literacy development research and new instructional strategies that foster literacy development. Consequently, teachers resorted to past experience and used the instructional strategies that were comfortable.

Finally, Moffat (1994) stressed the amount of time and energy that was necessary to implement an emergent literacy philosophy in the classroom. With an already demanding schedule, teachers were reluctant to embrace a philosophy that involved collecting books and materials, becoming proficient in new instructional techniques, designing developmentally appropriate activities, and dispensing with consumables and preset guidelines. Teachers recognized the extent of the involvement necessary and resisted committing to such a comprehensive, complex task.

According to the literature, the problem of meeting the diverse literacy needs of kindergarten students involved accepting the large body of new research that redefined how children learn to read and write and adopting the instructional strategies that facilitate literacy development. Many school districts, administrators, and teachers were reluctant to embrace the philosophy of emergent literacy and/or commit to the task of implementing

the philosophy in the classroom. Within the work setting, kindergarten students were not participating in a program that was successfully developing literacy skills. Administrators and teachers had conflicting philosophies regarding developmentally appropriate literacy instruction which inhibited the instructional process. The problem was how to effectively meet the diverse literacy needs of the kindergarten students in the work setting.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

The goal of the practicum was to meet the diverse literacy needs of the kindergarten students in the work setting.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum:

1. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving story retell using props and shared reading of a story are used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3 - 4 times per week).

2. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving memorization of simple poems and rhymes are used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3-4 times per week).

3. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving the acquisition and use of new vocabulary related to the unit of study are used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3-4 times per week).

4. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving music and art are used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3-4 times per week).

5. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving writing are used

"frequently" in classroom instruction (5 or more times per week).

6. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that learning centers that support literacy will be used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3-4 times per week).

7. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate "yes, definitely" on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) when asked if the language arts curriculum includes an integrated, thematic approach to instruction and learning.

8. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate "yes, definitely" on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) when asked if the language arts curriculum includes a home-school component.

9. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate "yes, definitely" on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) when asked if the language arts curriculum includes developmentally appropriate experiences.

10. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate "yes, definitely" on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) when asked if the language arts curriculum meets the needs of the kindergarten students.

11. After the practicum implementation, teacher interviews and classroom observations will reveal that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers created a classroom library that contains a minimum of 50 library books that are changed monthly and are both shelved and displayed with the covers visible to the students.

12. After the practicum implementation, teacher interviews and classroom observations will reveal that 2 out 2 kindergarten teachers created a print rich classroom environment

that includes environmental print, labels, and meaningful word lists.

Measurement of the Outcomes

Outcomes 1 through 6 were measured by documenting the responses on a written questionnaire (Appendix A) completed by kindergarten teachers at the conclusion of the practicum implementation. Teachers have an opportunity to respond to each part of question one using a Likert scale. Possible responses included: (a) never, (b) rarely, (c) sometimes, and (d) frequently.

Outcomes 7 through 10 were measured by documenting the responses on a written questionnaire (Appendix A) completed by kindergarten teachers at the conclusion of the practicum implementation. Teachers had an opportunity to respond to questions two and three using a Likert scale. Possible responses included: (a) no; (b) sort of; (c) yes; and, (d) yes, definitely.

Outcome 11 was measured through the use of teacher interviews and classroom observations. The writer questioned each kindergarten teacher concerning the number of library books available to students on a monthly basis and how often the books are changed. The writer observed the classroom libraries monthly to observe and record how the books were shelved and displayed.

Outcome 12 was measured by teachers interviews and classroom observation. The writer interviewed teachers and conducted classroom observations on a monthly basis to record evidence of the use of environmental print, labels, and meaningful word lists.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Statement of Problem

The school was not adequately prepared to meet the diverse literacy needs of the kindergarten students. The school was not providing a kindergarten language arts curriculum that fostered literacy development.

Discussion

The literature on emergent literacy, language arts curricula, and developmentally appropriate practices was reviewed to provide possible solutions to the problem of literacy development. The review included books, journal articles, and research studies published within the last 10 years. A number of solutions have been gleaned from the literature.

Carr (1994) described a successful literacy development program piloted in an urban kindergarten class that included three components: home-school component, classroom component, and tutoring component. The home-school component promoted reading in the home by sending home activities that parents and children completed together . The activities were designed to reinforce the classroom instruction in language arts. Parents were asked to read to children and then to have the children retell the story. To promote appropriate reading strategies, parents were given an opportunity to view a video tape of a teacher reading to several children. Students were also given an opportunity to retell the story to a teacher or assistant. In addition, each child took home a folder that contained an activity related to phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and so forth.

The classroom component focused on accelerated literacy development through the use of a print rich classroom environment, read-alouds at least two to three times per day, big

books to develop concepts of print and letter-sound correspondence, a marketed phonics program (Letter People), and group and individual writing (Carr, 1994). The teacher selected activities based on the needs of the students and stressed reading and writing that had meaning for the students.

The third component involved cross-age tutoring and peer tutoring. Trained fifth grade students worked with two groups of kindergarten students once per week for twenty minutes reading stories and extending the classroom instruction on concepts of print, phonemic awareness activities, and story retell. Peer tutors worked in pairs on writing activities to assist with phonemic awareness and invented spelling. The philosophy behind the tutoring component was to provide a support system for the students who were not receiving help at home (Carr, 1994).

To measure the results of the program, students were pre-posttested on several literacy tasks. The data indicated that the program positively affected the literacy growth of the students. The home-school and tutoring components significantly impacted student performance in the classroom component. Another contributing factor to the success of the program was the philosophy of the teacher with respect to what were appropriate learning experiences for young children.

Children learned through play experiences. Play settings/learning centers that were designed to support literacy development were suggested by Morrow and Rand (1991), Roskos and Neuman (1993), Roskos and Neuman (1994), and Schickendanz (1990). The settings included housekeeping, book corner, manipulatives, arts/crafts, writing, drama, and office. Other centers were added whenever appropriate. The centers were clearly

demarcated and made to simulate real life settings. Each center was designed to provide meaningful literacy activities through items such as phone books, recipe cards, cookbooks, coupons, store ads, fliers, calendars, notepads, pens, pencils, decals, library stamps, magazines, wall posters, labeled bins, maps, appointment books, index cards, forms, ledger sheets, file folders, menus, and so forth. The centers were used daily and students either selected a center or students were rotated through the centers. Participation in the center activities generated both functional and practical emergent literacy behaviors.

Cunningham and Allington (1994) described a literate home simulation kindergarten program designed to promote the reading and writing activities that foster literacy development for at-risk students. During the day-long program, students: (a) chose center activities; (b) participated in whole group shared reading of books that contain rhyme, repetition, and predictability; (c) rotated through assigned learning centers (math, language arts, listening, and writing); and, (d) read with, by, and to children for thirty minutes. The activities were extensions of the reading and writing activities that children should be participating in at home. Homework consisted of placing a little book, an index card, and a pencil in a reclosable bag and reading the book with a family member. Students wrote something on the card about the book and shared the writing with the class the next day.

Storybook reading has long been thought to be beneficial to the literacy development of young children, especially at-risk children. Morrow and O'Connor (1995) and Morrow, O'Connor , and Smith (1990) described a storybook reading program specifically developed to address the literacy needs of at-risk students. During a one hour language

arts instructional period, teachers provided students with time for quiet book reading, a teacher-directed literature activity, independent reading, and sharing of literacy activities. Instructional strategies used during the reading activities included: (a) directed listening-thinking activity, (b) story retelling, (c) repeated readings and attempted readings by students, and (d) the classroom library corner. Daily journal writing was also part of the program. Pre-posttest data revealed that when students were actively involved in retelling a story and shared reading there was an increase in story comprehension and an increased understanding of story structure.

Reutzel (1997) suggested a literacy program that utilized developmentally appropriate practices. The program consisted of the following strategies: (a) daily reading to children; (b) reading with children utilizing shared book reading strategies; (c) participation in music, chants, and poetry; (d) group reading and writing using the language experience approach; (e) independent reading; (f) message boards; (g) environmental print; (h) creating innovations and reproductions of commercial literature; and, (l) daily journal writing. All of the literacy activities were developed around thematic units integrated with other content areas in an effort to give meaning and promote connections between literacy learning. The students in this balanced literacy program participated in activities that matched the developmental level of the child. The literacy development of all the students increased, particularly the at-risk students.

The Success For All program is a school-wide reform in teaching reading (Ross, Smith, Madden, & Slavin, 1997). The program is designed to be implemented in kindergarten through sixth grade. The Early Learning (kindergarten) component resembles Reutzel's

(1997) program. The Early Learning component demonstrated that kindergarten students improved literacy skills by participating in activities that included: (a) read-alouds to increase comprehension, (b) shared reading to develop concepts of print, (c) phonemic awareness to promote an awareness of sounds, (d) the Peabody Language Development Kit to increase oral language, (e) learning centers with literacy materials to make connections beyond the classroom, (g) letter investigations to promote recognition of print and letter-sound correspondence, and (h) daily writing to develop emergent writing skills. The Success For All program has posted significant positive results in reading achievement for at-risk students when used school-wide.

The use of "big books" was the basis for a three stage approach to reading developed by Cunningham and Allington (1991). The book stage was designed to develop oral language skills and to help children "pretend" to read the book. During the interactive reading of the book, students were encouraged to make predictions, relate similar experiences, and join in group reading. Additional activities included acting out the story and taping the book. The word stage reinforced directionality and reading terms (letter, word, and sentence) and moved students toward accurate reading of the book. This stage involved students in matching words and sentences, identifying letters, sorting words by length or initial letters, creating student books, and reading rebus sentences using familiar words and pictures. The final stage was the letter-sound stage. Students began to recognize letter-sound correspondence by association with the text. Students were actively involved in making letter graphs, finding a single letter, learning sounds from key words, using rhyming words to decode, and examining compound words and word

endings. The program resulted in students understanding language concepts, associating reading and print, and acquiring letter-sound correspondence.

Based on research on how children develop skills and emergent literacy theory, Stickland and Morrow (1990) recommended an integrated, thematic approach that focused on children's interests and individual differences. Skills were developed as students were engaged in meaningful activities that center around a theme. Teachers selected a theme or unit of study and built literacy activities that supported the theme and were integrated with other content areas. Literacy activities were incorporated into art, music, science, math, and social studies to offer students an opportunity to see value in becoming literate. At the end of the day, students shared completed work and the work was displayed.

Temple, Nathan, Temple, and Burris (1993) described a kindergarten writing program that consisted of establishing prior knowledge and vocabulary, writing a story at the writer's developmental stage (picture, scribble, letter stringing, and so forth), and then sitting in the "author's chair" to share the story with the class. The "writing" activity took place at the beginning of the day with students gathered around the teacher to discuss what to write about. The emphasis was on pulling together thoughts and ideas, and on building vocabulary. The students "write" the story using pictures and/or letters. Interaction among the students was encouraged. Finally, students shared original stories with the rest of the class or with a partner. The program began on the first day of school and by the end of the year student writing had progressed from just pictures to words and sentences using invented spelling.

Schickendanz (1990) recommended creating a classroom environment that promoted literacy. The classroom was filled with labels for familiar objects, e. g. sink, door, table, and so forth. Charts, meaningful word lists, and signs were also evident throughout the classroom, e.g. helper chart, color word list, attendance roster, and so forth. Literacy materials such as alphabet puzzles, sandpaper letters, and literacy games were made available to the students for independent or small group use. In addition, each classroom was well-equipped with a library corner and a writing center where students could engage in literacy activities. The environment and the climate of the classroom increased the literacy development of the students.

The literature reviewed generated ideas concerning environmental print and shared reading and writing activities. Children were surrounded by print and recognized the print that is evident within the environment (Schickendanz, 1990). Therefore, using environmental print, alphabet posters were made and displayed in the classroom. For example, B was represented by the Burger King logo, D for Dunkin' Doughnuts, and Q for Q-Tips. As part of the daily routine, students read the alphabet posters to develop an understanding that reading is functional, that letters form words, and that letters have names and sounds.

As part of the shared reading and writing experience described by Cunningham and Allington (1991) and Reutzel (1997) respectively, students created class big books that were available for reading in the classroom library. The writing was completed as a whole group using a language experience story approach or completed independently in a small group or by pairs of students. Stories were a variety of genres, i.e. fiction, non-fiction,

poetry, how-to books, and so forth. The big books were laminated and assembled so students could read the stories while visiting the library corner.

To create a connection between literacy development at home and at school, a parent newsletter was designed and distributed to inform parents about units of study and literacy activities that were completed at home. This idea was an extension of the homework component suggested by Carr (1994). The newsletter was distributed at the beginning of each unit of study and contained information regarding the literature being used in the classroom, supplemental literature for use at home, the goals and expected outcomes of the unit, and extensions of classroom activities that connect literacy and the other content areas.

Carr's (1994) literacy program was a comprehensive approach to improving literacy in young children. The three components (home-school, classroom, and tutoring) and the activities that are contained within each of the components (read-alouds, big books, and writing) addressed the emergent literacy needs of kindergarten students. The use of the phonics program (Letter People) was not possible in the work setting due to the cost and the acceptability of the program by the administrative team. Also, the tutoring component utilizing fifth grade students required cooperation between the grade level teachers and assurances that the fifth grade students were not missing valuable time in class. With block reading schedules and special area classes for fifth grade students, scheduling the tutoring sessions on a consistent basis was difficult.

Given the research on play as a developmentally appropriate, literacy learning activity for young children, the play settings/learning centers described by Roskos and Neuman

(1994), Morrow and Rand (1991), and Schickendanz (1990) offered a viable method of developing literacy through play. The materials needed, although numerous, were easily obtained and the population being served had not been exposed to these kinds of items. The challenge for implementing play settings/learning centers in the classroom was space. The recommendation of the authors was to define certain areas for each center. The work setting classroom was small and finding space for the centers and all of the materials, along with the existing furniture, was difficult.

The design for the literate home simulation kindergarten program by Cunningham and Allington (1994) was a program that met the literacy needs of the at-risk kindergarten students in the work setting. The program was directed toward at-risk kindergarten students and included the components of an effective emergent literacy curriculum. The kindergarten classrooms in the work setting were self-contained and teachers created classroom schedules that would accommodate all of the components. Acquiring the little books for the homework packets was costly since each of the students needed to take a book home each night. For a class of 30 students, approximately 300 books were necessary.

Morrow and O'Connor (1995) and Morrow, O'Connor, and Smith (1990) suggested a one hour storybook reading program for literacy development. Although the activities during the instructional period were age-appropriate, the time constraint was an issue. Incorporating the various activities into one hour would rush the instruction and prevent the students from becoming totally involved in any one of the activities. This program needed to be part of a larger program in order to meet the needs of the students in the

work setting.

The literacy program utilizing developmentally appropriate practices developed by Reutzel (1997), the Success For All program (Ross, Smith, Madden, & Slavin, 1997), and the integrated, thematic approach discussed by Strickland and Morrow (1990) were complete, integrated literacy curricula. The emergent literacy strategies suggested incorporated literacy activities not only during language arts, but also throughout the other content areas. The use of themes allowed children to see the relationship between literacy, learning, and real-life experiences. The students in the work setting were environmentally deprived and lacked the experiences of other students. Both programs offered students the experiences and the exposure to a literate environment.

Using big books (Cunningham & Allington, 1991) as a shared reading strategy in the work setting was appropriate for the student population, but necessitated the purchase of a considerable number of books. The number of available big books to date was not sufficient to sustain the program throughout the year.

Temple, Nathan, Temple, and Burris (1993) offered a suggestion for a writing program designed to advance the writing skills of kindergarten students. Building on prior knowledge before writing was a key element to the program, particularly for the at-risk population in the work setting. The students did not possess the oral language and vocabulary skills, or the ability to coordinate thoughts, to feel confident enough to experiment with writing a story. The program removed the frustration that students experienced when asked to write a story. Also, sharing the students' writing with the class or a peer validated the students' attempt.

Students became literate when exposed to a climate of literacy (Schickendanz, 1990). Filling the classroom with labels, signs, charts, games, and so forth, created an atmosphere that promoted print awareness. The students in the work setting had limited awareness of print and teachers had minimally provided an atmosphere where students could develop this awareness. For example, each classroom had a library corner, but there were not enough books available to the students and books were not displayed in an inviting manner. Creating a print rich environment positively affected the literacy development of the kindergarten students in the work setting.

Each kindergarten teacher displayed a set of commercial alphabet posters that had little meaning for the students. The environmental print alphabet was meaningful to the students because of the familiar logos that were part of the students' environment. Students readily recognized the logos and began to associate the letter and the logo as something that could be read.

Using student writing to create big books, either as a result of a large or small group project, gave the child one more opportunity to associate reading and writing. The group effort allowed students to participate at a variety of developmental levels and the finished product was shared throughout the school year.

The communication between parents and teachers in the work setting was minimal. Parents were reluctant to question the teacher on how best to help the children. A parent newsletter was a first step in creating a connection between home and school. The newsletter provided the information to the parents without putting parents in an uncomfortable position. As a result students received appropriate assistance from parents

and the comfort level of parents with respect to communicating with the teacher increased.

Some of the suggested solutions required an expenditure of funds for books. However, all of the suggested solutions required a significant amount of time spent in planning and preparing the lessons and materials. With the exception of the Success For All curriculum, the programs did not utilize prepackaged, marketed curriculum. Teachers were responsible for the goals, objectives, outcomes, lesson plans, materials, and assessments that were necessary for the success of the programs. In addition, teachers were willing to implement the emergent literacy instructional strategies that were embedded in each of the programs. The teachers in the work setting supported the philosophy of emergent literacy and were committed to spending the time necessary to develop the materials and implement the instructional strategies that would increase the literacy development of the students.

Description of Selected Solutions

The solution strategies for the practicum included a classroom component and a home-school component. The classroom component consisted of creating an integrated, developmentally appropriate, thematic literacy curriculum and creating a print rich classroom environment. The home-school component was designed to promote a cooperative effort on the part of parents and teachers in promoting literacy.

In order to provide meaningful, related activities that were motivating and functional, the first practicum solution was to create an integrated, thematic approach to literacy. Eight, integrated, thematic units were designed with emphasis on literacy development. The activities were incorporated into all of the content areas; art, music, math, social

studies, health, and science.

The following emergent literacy instructional strategies were embedded in each of the themes. Read-alouds occurred daily. Two of the read-aloud books were selected per week for repeated use and story retell in order to develop oral language skills, increase vocabulary, and facilitate comprehension. Shared and/or guided reading of one big book each week developed students' concepts of print. The teacher used reading strategies (point and read, repetitive reading, and so forth) to facilitate participation by the students. To provide exposure to a variety of literacy materials, including environmental print, and to enhance the connections between literacy and other disciplines, a minimum of five learning centers (art, library, writing, drama, manipulatives, social studies, science, music, and construction) were used daily. The five centers remained the same for one week. Five groups of children rotated through the centers, one center per day. By the end of the week, all of the students participated in each center. Daily phonemic awareness activities, such as poems, songs, chants, rhymes, and so forth increased students' sense of sound and letter-sound correspondence. Daily journal writing provided an opportunity for students to associate speaking, reading, and writing, as well as develop a sense of composition. Weekly language experience stories provided teacher modeling and offered students an opportunity to participate in collective writing. Using a big book or a read-aloud book as a model, students created two class big books per unit. The student-made big books provided opportunities for practicing the writing process and independent reading. Class big books were be placed in the library corner.

The second practicum solution was a home-school connection. Literacy development

in young children is a cooperative effort between home and school; therefore, to facilitate literacy development in the home and to inform parents of activities occurring in the classroom, the following strategies were used. A parent newsletter was sent home at the beginning of each unit outlining the content and objectives of the unit and providing suggestions for literacy activities to be completed at home. In addition, twice per week students took home a book, index card, and pencil in a reclosable bag. Students and parents read the book together and wrote something about the book on the index card. Students shared the comments written on the card with the class the following day.

The third practicum solution was to create a print rich classroom environment to expose students to literacy and learning. The existing classroom library was redesigned to include items that support literacy development and to make the area motivating and inviting. Special attention was given to the number of books available to children, how the books were shelved and displayed, and when and how the children used the library. Also, an environmental print alphabet was designed and displayed using recognizable logos. A word wall consisting of student selected words was displayed. Attendance and homework charts, daily schedules, daily messages, and classroom labels were evident throughout the classroom.

Based on the literature reviewed, kindergarten students who participated in emergent literacy kindergartens fared better in terms of literacy development than students in reading readiness kindergartens. The instructional strategies contained within the thematic unit approach suggested above were a combination of the strategies suggested in the literature that demonstrated positive results in the literacy development of young children,

particularly at-risk children. Prior to the implementation of the practicum, teachers in the work setting were following the district's competency-based language arts curriculum which did not support the use of emergent literacy instructional strategies. Teachers utilizing the strategies in the solutions demonstrated the best emergent literacy teaching practices that were measured in practicum outcomes one through seven and outcome nine, and addressed the ultimate goal of successfully meeting the literacy needs of the kindergarten students in the work setting.

The home-school connection specifically addressed outcome eight. Children needed a literate home and school environment. The literature documented that parents often had unrealistic expectations for student achievement, and in the case of the work setting, were reluctant to question what was age-appropriate. The newsletter and the homework packets provided a linkage between home and school. Teachers provided parents with information regarding developmentally appropriate classroom literacy activities and suggested follow-up activities for use at home.

The print rich classroom immersed children in meaningful, functional literacy. Children saw and used familiar items that promoted literacy development. The evidence in the work setting indicated that teachers were not providing a classroom climate that fosters literacy development while using the prescribed language arts curriculum. Creating a literacy learning environment addressed outcomes 11 and 12 and attempted to provide the diverse student population with age-appropriate opportunities for literacy development.

Each of the suggested solutions had minimal monetary cost. However, to implement the solutions took time on the part of the kindergarten teachers. Existing materials were

assessed and reorganized, and new materials were designed and accumulated. Key to the success of the solutions was cooperation on the part of the kindergarten teachers in planning the units of study and committing to the use of the emergent literacy instructional strategies.

Report of Action Taken

The practicum implementation began with a meeting of the administrators and the kindergarten teachers. The writer described the problem and provided a rationale based on the literature reviewed for using emergent literacy instructional strategies. Careful attention was given to assuring the administration that the goals for kindergarten outlined by the district would be addressed and met through the use of the emergent literacy instructional practices. Shortly after gaining approval for the solution strategies a new interim principal and a new assistant principal were assigned to the work setting. A second meeting was held to gain support for the emergent literacy curriculum.

Following the meeting with the administrators, the kindergarten teachers met three consecutive afternoons for two hours each afternoon to discuss the components of an emergent literacy kindergarten curriculum. Again the literature reviewed provided the basis for discussion. Topics included: (a) strategies for conducting read-alouds, (b) shared reading and writing, (c) phonemic awareness activities, (d) emergent writing strategies, (e) developing integrated, thematic units, (f) providing a print rich environment and, (g) creating a home/school literacy connection.

The fourth two hour session focused on selecting the eight thematic units that provided the basis for the emergent literacy kindergarten curriculum. Existing materials and

resources, availability of new resources, and age-appropriate subject matter were taken into consideration when selecting the themes. Five hundred dollars for each classroom was allocated by the administration for the purchase of new materials. The eight themes selected were: (a) bears, (b) Fall/Halloween, (c) Thanksgiving, (d) winter holidays, (e) winter, (f) Africa, (g) the farm, and (h) plants. Additional units selected to complete the school year included: (a) butterflies, (b) the pond, and, (c) the ocean/beach. Each unit of study was planned to last approximately three weeks. The units and approximate time frames were shared with the media specialist to facilitate coordination of classroom and library instruction.

The first practicum solution strategy required the development of the thematic units. The development of each thematic unit took approximately two weeks, and the completed unit was given to the teachers one week prior to the starting date. The writer began by selecting the specific learning objectives in language arts. The learning objectives for the other subject areas were derived from the language arts literature selections and the theme. All of the objectives were commensurate with the district's Competency Based Curriculum Guide. Literacy connections were made throughout the subject areas. For purposes of discussion, the writer will draw examples from the farm unit and/or the winter unit. For example, the language arts objectives in the farm unit were: (a) to retell a familiar story; (b) to compare and contrast different versions of a familiar story; (c) to participate in the shared reading of a familiar story; (d) to increase expressive vocabulary; (e) to identify letter names and match like sounds for "f", "v", "p', and "g"; and, (f) to use emergent writing skills in creating an original story. One of the literature selections during

the farm unit was The Little Red Hen by Paul Galdone. Objectives for science, math, social studies, music, and art were selected based on the literature and emphasized a literacy connection. Science objectives were met by students planting seeds and keeping a diary of plant growth. Math and social studies objectives were met by measuring the ingredients and making doughnuts with a baker from Dunkin' Doughnuts and then writing a recipe for doughnuts. Music and art objectives were met by singing and dramatizing the original story and illustrating a student-made book about helpers. The writer attempted to use the theme as a means of integrating instruction across the curriculum.

Each unit contained literature that was designed for read-alouds. A minimum of one unit related book was read aloud daily to the students, usually at the beginning of the school day. The books provided the basis for the day's activities and were selected to facilitate comprehension, increase oral language, and acquire unit related vocabulary. Activities included: (a) picture walks, (b) making predictions, (c) activating prior knowledge, and (d) developing background information. Two of the read-aloud books were chosen each week for repeated use. Students retold the story in large and small groups or individually by using the original text, sequencing pictures, acting out the story, or story conferencing with the teacher or paraprofessional. The Three Little Pigs and The Three Billy Goats Gruff, both by Paul Galdone, and The Mitten by Jan Brett are illustrations of the kinds of books used for story retelling. Students donned costumes, designed scenery, and collected props to dramatize the story. The use of unit related vocabulary was encouraged. Each dramatization was videotaped.

One unit related big book was used per week to provide a shared reading experience

for students and to develop concepts of print. The big books selected used repetitive language, rhyming words, and rhythm to promote participation. Instructional strategies included: (a) point and read, (b) repetitive reading, (c) choral reading of repetitive parts, and, (d) fill in the missing word. In addition, the books were used to develop an awareness of titles, authors, illustrators, words, sentences, punctuation, and illustrations. Books such as The Day the Goose Got Loose by Reeve Lindburgh and Inside A Barn In The Country by Alyssa Satin Capucilli are examples of shared reading books used during the farm unit.

Each week the writer planned activities for five learning centers; library, housekeeping/drama, art, writing, and construction. The students participated in one learning center activity each day for approximately 30 minutes each day. By the end of the week each student had participated in each center. Students visited the library center to select books to read, some of which were unit related. Other materials such as magazines, newspapers, brochures, and student-made big books were available. Paper was provided so students could write and/or draw a picture about a favorite book.

The housekeeping/drama center included costumes, puppets, "dress up" clothes, stuffed animals, and so forth, as well as literacy materials. The center became part of the unit theme. For example, during the farm unit the center was transformed into the house of the Little Red Hen and included cookbooks, recipe cards, and menus. During the winter unit the center was filled with winter clothing and the students dressed for a cold day in the snow. Students wrote a letter to someone in Florida describing the snowy day.

Another area of the room was devoted to the writing center. Paper, pencils, stamp

pads and letters, crayons, colored pencils, and computers remained in the center permanently. When appropriate, other items were added for the unit of study. Again, the writer selected activities and writing prompts that were connected to the theme. To illustrate, students wrote recipes for vegetable soup and created a cookbook. Another activity involved students sending letters of apology for not helping to the Little Red Hen.

Because of space constraints, the art center and the block center needed to be set up each day. The art center was contained in a see-through plastic box and was set up at the work tables. Each week the center contained a theme related activity that utilized different mediums and materials, i.e. paint, fingerpaint, colored tissue paper, chalk, clay, and so forth. In the art center, students examined farm animal books and created a farm animal out of clay. During the winter unit, students created a snowman out of soap flakes and wrote the directions for making a real snowman.

The block center (construction) was also set up daily in the back of the room. The blocks and construction materials were placed in drawstring bags and kept in a large block box on wheels. The box was rolled to a designated area during learning center time. Materials included wooden blocks, Legos, Lincoln Logs, various snap together links and cubes, toothpicks, tongue depressors, styrofoam, and when necessary, materials that were specific to an activity. Building material catalogues, blueprints, diagrams, and home decorating magazines were part of the center materials. Projects for the farm and winter units included building a corral for the farm animals and listing the items that were needed, creating snowshoes and writing directions for use, and making a pair of mittens and listing things that come in pairs.

Phonemic awareness activities were built into the unit and used daily. Poems, songs, chants, and rhymes were used to increase the students' awareness of sounds, letter-sound correspondence, rhyming words, fluency, and rhythm. Most of the activities were collected over a period of time and the authors are unknown. The material was reorganized to fit the theme. After learning the poems, songs, and so forth, the writer encouraged the teachers to use the material as often as possible during the unit, i.e. during transition times as a means of quieting the students, as a way of getting the students' attention, and/or while getting in line. Once the teacher started reciting or singing, the students quickly began participating. Suggestions for phonemic awareness activities included Mother Goose nursery rhymes, songs such as Six Little Ducks, poems such as Winter Snow or Chubby Little Snowman, and chants like Snow is Falling.

Daily journal writing was also part of each unit. Journals were created by the writer for each child. Twenty-five pieces of story paper (12 x 18) were folded in half and spiral bound between covers of 9 x 12 construction paper. Journal writing began each morning as students entered the classroom. While writing center activities usually followed a prompt by the teacher, journal writing was purely student-generated. The writing ranged from pictures to invented spelling. Each entry was dated so both students and teachers could observe progress in emergent writing skills. Each morning a few students were asked to share with the class. All of the students were given an opportunity to share the writing with a partner.

The language experience approach to shared writing was used weekly. Students in the classroom participated in a shared experience, such as cooking vegetable soup, visiting a

working farm, or making hot chocolate. The teacher modeled the writing process and served as a recorder as students brainstormed ideas, organized thoughts through mapping, and dictated sentences. Using point and read strategies, the teacher and students read the story frequently during the unit. Chart tablets were used for the language experience stories and were placed in the library as a classroom storybook.

Two books per unit were selected by the writer as models for student-created big books. The two books selected were either read-aloud or shared reading books. By dictating text to the teacher or paraprofessional, students expanded, elaborated, or created original text for the class big book. After reading What's Inside? by Mary Jane Martin, students followed the format of the text and in response to the question, dictated a description of what was inside the egg. The text was typed, including the name of the student, and mounted on 12 x 18 inch construction paper along with the hatching egg created by the student. The Three Little Pigs by Paul Galdone was also used as a model for a big book. The class big book was titled The Twenty-Six Little Pigs. Each of the students described what a school was made of and designed the school on paper using a variety of materials, e.g. toothpicks, tongue depressors, tissue paper, cotton balls, and so forth. The concluding page depicted a school made of teachers, students, and parents which could not be blown down. Every student contributed a page to the big books. Each big book was spiral bound and placed in a hanging bag in the library corner. Students were free to read the big books when visiting the library.

The second practicum solution strategy was a home-school connection. A variety of easy-to-read, controlled vocabulary books were used for the "Book in a Bag" home-

school literacy program. Forty-eight different titles were sent home with each student over a six month period. Each month the writer placed eight titles, seven copies of each title, in individual Zip-loc bags. Also included in the bag was a paper with a writing prompt related to the story, a pencil, and directions for completing the writing assignment. Four titles were given to each kindergarten class and were circulated over a two week period. Books were usually sent home on Mondays and Wednesdays. At the end of the two weeks the kindergarten teachers switched the titles.

Parents were asked to read the book several times with the child and discuss the writing prompt. Students used emergent writing skills to complete the writing assignment and then drew a picture to go with the writing. To illustrate, after reading The Farm (Silver Burdett/Ginn) the students were asked to write a riddle about a favorite farm animal. After reading Up, Up, and Away! (Silver Burdett/Ginn) the students made a list of the things one would see when looking up. The books and the writing assignment were returned the next day. Students shared the writing with the entire class or with a peer. The writing was collected and maintained in a student portfolio. Some writing was reproduced and included in the class newsletter.

The directions contained in each bag indicated that after reading the book with the child and discussing the writing assignment, parents should let the child complete the writing assignment independently using emergent writing skills. However, parents used a variety of strategies for helping the children. Some parents let the child write independently, others let the child dictate the writing. A few parents let the child dictate the story and then the child copied the writing. Regardless of the strategy used, parents

and children were working together to complete the literacy activity.

Each month a parent newsletter was written, published, and disseminated by the writer. The newsletter contained a summary of the previous unit of study including the literature used, poems and songs that were taught, writing activities, learning center projects, and content area connections. The instructional goals for the upcoming unit were part of each newsletter. In addition, information related to how children learn to read and write, as well as how parents can assist children in developing literacy skills, was included. The use of a scanner and digital camera allowed for the incorporation of photos of students working and reproductions of pictures and writing.

The third practicum solution strategy was to create a print rich classroom environment. The classroom was rearranged to provide space for learning centers that were visible to the children and supported literacy development. As previously mentioned, the library, housekeeping/drama, and writing centers were fixed centers in the classroom. The art center was displayed in a clear storage box and was marked accordingly. The block center was set up each day. Each center contained a variety of literacy materials appropriate for the center. Items included telephone books, cookbooks, menus, message pads and a message board, stationary, newspapers, blueprints, magazines, flyers, travel brochures, and so forth. Writing was encouraged as part of the center activity.

The writer worked with kindergarten teachers throughout the practicum to create a print-rich classroom environment. An environmental alphabet was created by the writer for each classroom. Logos from familiar products and services were mounted on construction paper with the beginning letter of the logo. For example, K is for K-Mart, N

is for Nike, B is for Burger King, C is for Coke, and so forth. Each letter was laminated and the alphabet was displayed in each classroom at the students' eye-level. The alphabet was referred to frequently throughout the practicum.

At the beginning of the practicum one word classroom labels were placed around the room in order for students to associate the word with the object. Labels included the clock, chalkboard, table, chair, door, and so forth. Labels were eventually expanded to include phrases such as classroom clock, hallway door, small chair, and so forth. By the end of the practicum implementation labels were expanded to complete sentences. For example, the label "hallway door" read, "This is the hallway door".

The vocabulary words that were highlighted in the unit were displayed on the wall and remained there throughout the practicum implementation. A picture accompanied each word to provide a reference for the students. Students were encouraged to use the words in conversation, as well as in writing activities. Vocabulary words such as hibernate, camouflage, farmer, migrate, silo, meadow, and so forth are examples of farm unit vocabulary.

The classroom library was redesigned to support literacy, be attractive and inviting, and user friendly. Approximately 75 books were removed from the school library and placed in each kindergarten classroom. Books were placed in file crates and were stacked at eye level. The books were changed monthly. Twenty books relevant to the study unit were displayed on top of the crates, on a chalkboard ledge, or on a book display board with the covers visible to the students. As the unit changed, the books changed. The library was maintained by a student designated as the classroom librarian.

In addition to the library books and as space would allow, the library corner was designed to be a comfortable and informal place for students to read and share books. A rocking chair, pillows, and small table were added. A window valance was hung above the library bulletin board and the bulletin board was labeled "Window to the World". Students drew pictures and wrote about favorite books. The work was displayed on the board along with book jackets, posters, and so forth.

Chapter V: Results

Results

The problem in the work setting was that the school was not adequately prepared to meet the literacy needs of the kindergarten students. The school was not providing a learning environment that fostered emergent literacy skills. The practicum was designed to offer students a kindergarten language arts curriculum that promoted the development of emergent literacy skills through participation in integrated, thematic units of study which incorporated emergent literacy instructional strategies. In addition, the practicum included a home-school connection to engage parents, students, and teachers in a cooperative effort to promote literacy. The practicum also provided for the creation of a print-rich classroom environment. The goal of the practicum was to meet the diverse literacy needs of the kindergarten students in the work setting.

The following were the outcomes and results of the practicum:

1. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving story retell using props and shared reading of a story are used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3 - 4 times per week).

The outcome was met.

The data collected from the questionnaire revealed that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers used story retell using props and shared reading of a story "frequently" (5 or more times per week). Prior to the practicum implementation teachers "rarely" (1 - 2 times per week) used the strategies.

2. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving memorization of simple poems and rhymes are used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3 - 4 times per week).

The outcome was met.

The responses to the questionnaire indicated that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers used poems and rhymes during classroom instruction "sometimes" (3 - 4 times per week). Prior to the practicum implementation teachers were 'rarely" using the activities (1 - 2 times per week).

3. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving the acquisition and use of new vocabulary related to the unit of study are used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3 - 4 times per week).

The outcome was met.

Questionnaire responses revealed that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers were involving students in vocabulary acquisition activities related to the unit of study "sometimes" (3 - 4 times per week). The results showed an increase in vocabulary acquisition activities from "rarely" (1 - 2 times per week) to "sometimes" (3 - 4 times per week).

4. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving music and art are used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3 - 4 times per week).

The outcome was met.

The questionnaire responses indicated that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers were using activities involving music and art "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3 - 4 times per week). Prior to the practicum implementation teachers were using the activities "rarely" in classroom instruction (1 - 2 times per week).

5. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that activities involving writing are used "frequently" in classroom instruction (5 or more times per week).

The outcome was met.

Responses to the questionnaire revealed that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers used writing activities "frequently" in classroom instruction (5 or more times per week). Prior to the practicum implementation, teachers "rarely" used writing activities (1 - 2 times per week).

6. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) that learning centers that support literacy will be used "sometimes" in classroom instruction (3 - 4 times per week).

The outcome was met.

Teacher responses to the questionnaire revealed that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers used learning centers that support literacy "sometimes" in the classroom instruction (3 - 4 times per week). Prior to the practicum implementation teachers used the centers "rarely" in the classroom (1 - 2 times per week).

7. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate "yes, definitely" on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) when asked if the

language arts curriculum includes an integrated, thematic approach to instruction and learning.

The outcome was met.

Questionnaire results indicated that 2 out of 2 kindergarten responded "yes, definitely" when asked if the language arts curriculum included an integrated, thematic approach to instruction and learning. Prior to the practicum implementation teachers responded "no" to the questionnaire item.

8. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate "yes, definitely" on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) when asked if the language arts curriculum includes a home-school component.

The outcome was met.

Questionnaire responses revealed that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers responded "yes, definitely" when asked if a home-school component was part of the language arts curriculum. Prior to the practicum implementation teachers responded "no" to the questionnaire item.

9. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate "yes, definitely" on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) when asked if the language arts curriculum includes developmentally appropriate experiences.

The outcome was met.

Questionnaire responses indicated that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers responded "yes, definitely" when asked if the language arts curriculum included developmentally appropriate experiences. Prior to the practicum implementation teachers responded "no"

to the questionnaire item.

10. After the practicum implementation, 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers will indicate "yes, definitely" on a teacher-made questionnaire (Appendix A) when asked if the language arts curriculum meets the needs of the kindergarten students.

The outcome was met.

Questionnaire responses revealed that 2 out of 2 teachers responded "yes, definitely" when asked if the language arts curriculum meets the needs of the kindergarten students. Prior to the practicum implementation teachers responded "no" to the questionnaire item.

11. After the practicum implementation, teacher interviews and classroom observations will reveal that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers created a classroom library that contains a minimum of 50 library books that are changed monthly and are both shelved and displayed with the covers visible to the students.

The outcome was met.

Meetings with the teachers and weekly classroom observations indicated that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers created a classroom library that contained a minimum of 50 library books that were changed monthly and were shelved and displayed with covers visible to the students. Library check-out records also documented the number and frequency of books checked-out for classroom use. Prior to the practicum implementation library records revealed that teachers checked out a maximum of 20 books per month for classroom libraries and observations indicated that all of the books were shelved with only the binding visible to the students.

12. After the practicum implementation, teacher interviews and classroom

observations will reveal that 2 out of 2 kindergarten teachers created a print rich classroom environment that includes environmental print, labels, and meaningful word lists.

The outcome was met.

Teacher interviews and classroom observations indicated that 2 out of 2 teachers created a classroom environment that included environmental print, labels, and meaningful word lists. Prior to the practicum implementation interviews and observations revealed that teachers did not display or use environmental print, classroom labels, or word lists in the classroom.

Discussion

Outcomes one through twelve addressed the implementation of the methodologies and the creation of a classroom environment found to be effective in emergent literacy classrooms. Each of the twelve outcomes was met because teachers embraced the paradigm of emergent literacy offered by Sulzby (1991) and Teale (1995). There was a strong commitment on the part of the classroom teachers and school administrators to address the literacy needs of the at-risk kindergarten population in the work setting. In an attempt to close the gap between students who are ready to participate in a structured reading program in first grade and those who are not, teachers were receptive to utilizing a new approach to the acquisition of literacy skills.

Accepting the paradigm of emergent literacy also meant acknowledging the theories behind how children learn to read and write. Strickland (1990) and Kulleseid and Strickland (1989) described the process as one that was ongoing from infancy through

adulthood as individuals interacted with print and verbal material. The frequency and quality of the interactions with adults impacted the degree of literacy attained. In addition, learning to read and write was an integrated process and required the child to be engaged in meaningful activities with adults serving as listeners and role models. After using a language arts curriculum based on reading readiness theories that are diametrically opposed to emergent literacy theories and noting the attitudes of the students, lack of student progress, and teacher dissatisfaction with the age-appropriateness of the instructional strategies , the kindergarten teachers incorporated the new theories of how children learn to read and write into a personal philosophy. The personal philosophy translated into a willingness to implement the methodologies inherent in an emergent literacy classroom.

Outcomes one through six and outcome nine specifically addressed the teachers' use of some of the developmentally appropriate instructional strategies that researchers recommended to increase emergent literacy skills, i.e. story retell using props (Cunningham & Allington, 1991), shared reading (Ross, Smith, Madden, & Slavin, 1997; Ruetzel, 1997), unit related vocabulary (Carr, 1994), music and art activities ((Strickland & Morrow, 1990), opportunities for writing (Temple, Nathan, Temple, & Burris, 1993), and literacy supported learning centers (Morrow & Rand, 1991; Roskos & Neuman, 1993; Schickendanz, 1990). All of the above strategies were embedded in each unit and used on a consistent basis by the teachers. Initially teachers expressed concern about using the strategies as frequently as specified in the outcomes. However, once teachers became comfortable with the strategies and a specific daily routine was developed, frequency of

use was no longer an issue. By the conclusion of the practicum, the teachers were implementing the methodologies with ease which resulted in reaching the goals in outcomes one through six and outcome nine.

Outcomes seven and eight dealt with the components of an effective emergent literacy classroom. Strickland and Morrow (1990) suggested that based on accepted theories of how children learn, emergent literacy classrooms should incorporate instructional strategies into a theme or unit of study. The theme should be multidisciplinary and integrated across the curriculum. The eight units designed by the writer followed the format outlined by Strickland and Morrow. The literature used for read-alouds and shared reading, art and music activities, writing prompts, learning centers, vocabulary, and so forth all focused on a central theme that allowed students to make connections between the classroom and the real world. Consequently, outcome seven was met.

The home-school program designed by the writer achieved outcome eight. Carr (1994) emphasized the need to build a bridge between home and school and described a program that involved students and parents working together to complete a reading and writing assignment at home. The "Book in a Bag" program designed by the writer entailed students and parents reading a book together (theme related), discussing the story and the writing prompt, and letting students use emergent writing skills to respond to the prompt. The program provided an opportunity for parents to serve as literacy models, as well as provide an opportunity for the quality adult interactions described by Kulleseid and Strickland (1989) and Strickland (1990).

The creation and distribution of a kindergarten newsletter provided an additional link

between parents and the classroom. Parents frequently commented on how the newsletter provided information on student expectations, classroom activities, upcoming events, and how to help your child at home. Parents particularly responded to the inclusion of pictures and student work. Both the "Book in a Bag" program and the newsletter provided the home-school component that resulted in the accomplishment of outcome eight.

Creating a classroom environment that promoted literacy was addressed in outcomes 11 and 12. According to Schickendanz (1990), classrooms should be filled with printed materials and contain an inviting, well-equipped classroom library. Kindergarten teachers introduced labels, charts, an environmental alphabet, literacy materials in every learning center, as well as a comfortable library corner where students could go to read a variety of literature. The printed materials were used daily to "read around the room". Not only did teachers create a literacy environment, students and parents began to add items. Items contributed by families included menus, message pads, cookbooks, travel brochures, an appointment book, and so forth. The media specialist assisted by selecting books that were unit related and placing them in the classroom library. Creating a print-rich classroom environment to achieve outcomes 11 and 12 became a cooperative effort.

All of the outcomes measured what teachers did to create an emergent literacy classroom. The writer designed the themes and teachers implemented the strategies and created the classroom environment. Although the practicum did not measure student achievement, some unexpected outcomes were observed. Teachers reported changes in student attitudes, behaviors, and progress as a result of the emergent literacy curriculum.

First, as students participated in a developmentally appropriate curriculum and began to experience success, there was a change in attitude. Students gained confidence and were willing and eager to participate in classroom activities. Parents reported that students were eager to come to school and average daily attendance increased from 80% to 96%.

Second, student behavior improved. Students were working at an appropriate instructional level and engaging in activities that were meaningful and motivating. As a result, students worked cooperatively and interacted appropriately with teachers and peers.

Third, teachers documented steady student progress in both reading and writing. Prior to using the emergent literacy curriculum, students entered kindergarten without literacy skills and as the year progressed many still lacked the literacy skills necessary to be successful in the first grade reading program. However, after participating in the emergent literacy curriculum, student evaluations designed to measure mastery of the district kindergarten benchmarks revealed that 70% of the kindergarten students have mastered the benchmarks compared to 25% the previous year.

Based on the positive effects on student attitudes, behaviors, and progress, teachers agreed that the emergent literacy curriculum met the literacy needs of the kindergarten students. Teachers believed in the philosophy of how children become literate and worked cooperatively with parents and students to provide an environment that fostered literacy growth. Teachers gained confidence in utilizing the instructional methodologies and were committed to the use of the strategies. Kindergarten teachers shared the vision of making the kindergarten curriculum and classroom one that promoted literacy development.

Recommendations

1. In order to make a significant curriculum change and still comply with the district guidelines, support from the administration and subject area supervisors is imperative.

2. The time spent on developing the units was significant. Before attempting to implement, allow enough time to gather and organize materials.

3. The purchase of materials to complete units was necessary. Look into possible monetary donations, grants, or reallocation of textbook monies to cover the purchases.

4. Develop parental support and cooperation. Parents need to understand the rationale and methodologies behind the emergent literacy curriculum.

Dissemination

The practicum is being presented to the first grade teachers with the idea of continuing emergent literacy practices in first grade. Also, the curriculum is scheduled for continued use next school year and is being presented to parents at a parent meeting prior to the opening of school. The units developed by the writer will be bound and made available to other kindergarten teachers in the district through the regional office.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

This questionnaire was created using the some of the guidelines for kindergarten language arts curricula established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, The International Reading Association, and the Association for Childhood Education International.

1. Using the following scale, please indicate your estimate of how many times per week these activities are provided for the students in your classroom.

never	rarely	sometimes	frequently
0 times	1 - 2 times	3 - 4 times	5 or more times

a. participation in phonemic awareness activities (e.g. rhyming words, matching sounds, alliterations)
never rarely sometimes frequently

b. story retell using props
never rarely sometimes frequently

c. shared reading of a story
never rarely sometimes frequently

d. memorization of simple poems, rhymes, etc.
never rarely sometimes frequently

e. acquisition and use of new vocabulary related to the unit of study
never rarely sometimes frequently

f. read-alouds
never rarely sometimes frequently

g. student selected activities
never rarely sometimes frequently

h. music activities (e.g. singing, listening)
never rarely sometimes frequently

i. art activities (e.g. drawing, painting, cutting, pasting)
never rarely sometimes frequently

j. writing center (e.g. pencils, paper, markers, stamp pads)
never rarely sometimes frequently

k. word awareness (e.g. teacher modeling, speech-print match by pointing while reading)
never rarely sometimes frequently

l. learning centers that support literacy
never rarely sometimes frequently

2. Does the language arts curriculum provide for the diverse needs of the students by having the following components....

a. an integrated, thematic approach to instruction and learning?
no sort of yes yes, definitely

b. a home-school component?
no sort of yes yes, definitely

c. regular opportunities for students to interact with each other in small groups?
no sort of yes yes, definitely

d. developmentally appropriate experiences?
no sort of yes yes, definitely

3. Overall, do you feel the language arts curriculum meets the needs of the kindergarten students in your classroom?
no sort of yes yes, definitely